The purpose of this course is to provide students with an overview of the world of work and the lives of workers. Students will learn about:

- the changing nature of work and the impact of technological change;
- the economic cycle, income and unemployment;
- social class, immigration, race, ethnicity and gender;
- the impact of globalization on workers and unions in the United States and other countries, and the arguments over free trade and protectionism;
- the role of government in labor policy and job creation, the social safety net, child labor laws and occupational safety and health issues;
- the history of unions, the growth and changing nature of corporations, the role of unions in politics, and the challenges unions face today;
- collective bargaining, worker rights and worker participation in management;
- how work, income, benefits and labor movements in the United States compare to the rest of the world.

With the world economy being transformed by globalization and the United States muddling through a jobless recovery, we will pay special attention to how workers and their unions react to the fragility of workplace security in a rapidly changing world economy.

Students are expected to read the material assigned for each class and be prepared to discuss it. Midterm and final exams will be based both on the assigned readings and on in-class lectures, so attendance and good note-taking is important.

The assigned textbook for the course is Stephen Sweet and Peter Meiksins’ Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy. All other readings can be accessed and downloaded through the Rutgers "Sakai" website. Reading assignments may change occasionally during the semester. Changes will be announced in class and on email, so students must maintain an email account and check it.

Learning Objectives

This is a social science course; the following SAS learning objectives are particularly relevant:

h. Understand the bases and development of human and societal endeavors across time and place. One learning objective involves understanding how U.S. workers have reacted to the
changing nature of work, to their class position in American society, and to particular contingencies like immigration. You will gain an overview of the history of the American labor movement, how it fits into a global context, and how race, ethnicity and gender affect workers. You will demonstrate knowledge through writing assignments and/or examinations.

k. Understand different theories about human culture, social identity, economic entities, political systems, and other forms of social organization. A second objective involves understanding theories regarding the relationship between economic organization (e.g., the extent of economic markets and corporate structures) and the type of worker organization and public policy responses that are needed to improve the lives of workers. You will demonstrate this knowledge through writing assignments and/or examinations.

l. Apply concepts about human and social behavior to particular questions or situations. A third objective will be for you to apply these theories to current policy debates. You will demonstrate this through participation in two debates -- one in-class and one online -- and through participation in a collective bargaining exercise based on current situations.

Assessment and Grading

Students will be divided early in the semester into six groups of about 12 students each for breakout sessions and projects. Each group will be under the supervision of a Teaching Assistant.

Grades will be based upon the in-class midterm and final exams, attendance and participation in the following exercises and group projects:

- A family history/immigration paper and oral history project. In addition to writing the paper, students will make 5-minute oral presentations on their family background within their groups.
- A public in-class debate on a public policy issue (Each group will participate in a debate on one of the following: Is the gender gap in pay and the glass ceiling justified? Is immigration good for the American economy and American workers? Is free trade good for American worker?)
- A creative presentation to the class taking an advocacy position on another of the three policy issues. Options include, but are not limited to, a political ad, a video, a commercial, a live TV show, a skit or a song
- A multi-class collective bargaining exercise in which all of the groups will negotiate contracts based on current, high-profile issues. Previous classes have negotiated givebacks in the New Jersey state budget and Woodbridge school budget; the next National Football League, Major League Baseball and National Basketball Association contracts; and a new United Auto Workers-General Motors contract in the midst of GM’s bankruptcy.

Participation in the various group projects counts for 35 percent of the grade, the midterm and final exams each are worth 25 percent, and the family history paper makes up 15 percent of the final grade.
Syllabus

Introduction

Thursday, September 4

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE: What is Labor Studies and why is it important? Discussion of work, family, immigration and how the precariousness of job and income security affects workers and their families. Relate Great Depression and decline of manufacturing in late 1970s and early 1980s to the recession and globalization today.

FILM: "Grand Army of Starvation"

FIRST ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT: Interview parents/grandparents/family about their jobs and immigration history.

I. Class, Income and Mobility

Thursday, September 11

LECTURE: Class, Immigration, Family and the Centrality of Work

READINGS: Stephen A. Sweet and Peter Meiksins, Changing Contours of Work: Jobs and Opportunities in the New Economy Chapter 1, "Mapping the Contours of Work" and Chapter 2, "How New is the New Economy?"


Thursday, September 18

LECTURE: Income, Social Mobility and the Struggle to Survive

READINGS: Sweet and Meiksins, Ch. 3, “Economic Inequality, Social Mobility and the New Economy,” and Ch. 4, “Whose Jobs Are Secure?”


CLASS EXERCISE: How much money do you need to live?
II. Labor and Corporate History, and the Changing Nature of Work

Thursday, September 25

LECTURE: U.S. Labor History: The Industrial Revolution, the Rise of Corporations, Craft Unions vs. the “One Big Union” Movement, the Great Depression, the CIO and the Rise of the Middle Class

FILM EXCERPTS: “War in Paterson: The Great Silk Strike of 1913”


READINGS: TBD

II. Gender, Race and Ethnicity Issues in the Workplace

Thursday, October 2

LECTURE: Women and Work

READINGS: Sweet and Meiksins, Ch. 6, “Gender Chasms in the New Economy”

CLASS EXERCISE I: First Debate and First Creative Presentations: Is the gender gap in pay and the glass ceiling justified? On-Line Debate follows at 10 p.m. that night


ASSIGNMENT DUE: Family and immigration paper due

Thursday, October 9

LECTURE: African-Americans and Work in America

FILM: "At the River I Stand" (1993 documentary on Martin Luther King and 1968 Memphis sanitation workers strike)

READINGS: Sweet and Meiksins, Ch. 7, “Race, Ethnicity and Work”
Thursday, October 16

LECTURE: Hispanics and the New Immigrants


OVERVIEW of first half of course/REVIEW for midterm

Thursday, October 23

IN-CLASS MIDTERM EXAM

IV. Collective Bargaining

Thursday, October 30

LECTURE: The Economic Cycle, Wage Determination and the Challenges of Collective Bargaining in the Private and Public Sectors


Sweet and Meiksins, Ch. 5, “A Fair Day’s Work”


Thursday, November 6

CLASS EXERCISE III: Collective Bargaining Session 1

Thursday, November 13

CLASS EXERCISE III: Collective Bargaining Session 2

V. Politics and the Role of Government

Thursday, November 20

LECTURE: Labor, Politics and the Role of Government: Health Care, Economic Stimulus Measures and Union Regulation
READINGS: TBD

VI. Globalization and the New World Economy

Tuesday, November 25

LECTURE: Globalization, NAFTA, Free Trade and Protectionism

READINGs: Thomas Friedman, excerpt from “The World Is Flat”


THANKSGIVING BREAK

Thursday, December 4

CLASS EXERCISE IV: Debate and Creative Presentations: Is free trade good for U.S. Workers and the American Economy? On-Line Debate follows at 10 p.m. that evening.

OVERVIEW of the course and REVIEW for final exam